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SUBJECT: USAID AND GOSS OPEN NEW ROADS, LOCAL AUTHORITIES CRITICIZE
GOSS

11. Summary: On Thursday, March 6 and Friday, March 7 USAID, Consulate General Juba, and the Government of Southern Sudan commemorated the groundbreaking of two new road projects to help rebuild infrastructure in Southern Sudan. The combined projects will cost in excess of \$100 million and will connect major cities and trading centers in the south. Local authorities in Western Equatoria State criticized the GoSS for not responding to their desires on the routing of their new road. End Summary.

SISP Project Gets Underway

12. The Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have jointly identified the heavily traveled road between Juba and Nimule as the first priority for investment under USAID's Sudan Infrastructure Services Project (SISP). SISP aims to build and rehabilitate critical infrastructure that will restore basic services, build markets and consolidate peace. The Nimule road is the most direct route between Juba and the important trade hubs of Nairobi, Kampala and Mombasa. Improving the road will significantly benefit the markets and economy of Southern Sudan.

13. The planned development of the 192-kilometer road starts with demining, emergency repairs to severely deteriorated and failing bridges, and re-grading and maintenance of the existing roadbed. A topographical and geophysical survey, replacement of seven bridges and design and construction of a new paved road will follow. USAID already has obligated over \$26 million of the estimated \$70 million required for roadway repair and reconstruction. It is anticipated that additional funds will be provided in order to support the rapid development of the project. Construction will require 16 to 20 months to complete once the design-build contractor is mobilized.

GoSS Touts Peace Dividend

14. The March 6 inauguration of this project was overseen by President of the Southern Sudan Salva Kiir Mayardit, who participated despite a heavy schedule that required him to leave directly after the ceremony for Khartoum. Consul General Christopher Datta was a keynote speaker. He was told by members of Kiir's delegation that the President was making this a major media event in order to demonstrate the peace dividend the CPA is bringing to Southern Sudan. Southern television and radio gave the event extensive coverage, including broadcast of large portions of CG Datta's speech touting U.S. cooperation with the GoSS and support for the CPA.

Yambio-Tambura Road Project Kickoff

15. The next day saw a similar ground breaking ceremony for the Yambio-Tambura road, part of a corridor that will eventually connect Juba to Wau via Yambio. This project also aims to build and rehabilitate critical infrastructure that will help to restore basic

services, build markets, and consolidate peace. The Yambio-Tambura road runs parallel to two international borders - Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of Congo - through the state of Western Equatoria, often considered the "bread basket" of Southern Sudan. The road reconstruction will increase food security, and accelerate trade and economic growth.

¶16. The planned development of the 185 kilometer road includes de-mining, rehabilitation of four bridges, and construction of six-meter-wide, all-weather gravel road at a cost of about \$28 million. Construction of the Yambio-Tambura road supports the USG's overall objective to improve access to infrastructure, support the safe return and reintegration of internally displaced people and refugees, generate employment, and develop local capacity.

Local Officials Voice Discontent

¶17. This second event was officiated by the Minister of Roads and Transportation and the Minister of Housing, Lands and Public Utilities. The Acting Governor of Western Equatoria State represented local authorities. Although the community pulled out all the stops to commemorate the event with music and the slaughter of a bull, there was a great deal of local unhappiness concerning the route the new road would take, and the Acting Governor made the community's feelings publicly known in his speech, heavily criticizing the central government for not listening or responding to the needs of his constituency. Instead of being an event to show how the GoSS is helping and providing for local communities, as intended, it rather had the opposite effect of opening the government to criticism for not being sensitive to local interests. The local population expressed dismay that there is no plan for construction of feeder roads that would open markets in CAR and Congo to local farmers.

¶18. Congen Datta and GoSS officials made the point in return that this project was just a beginning and was meant to create a central road infrastructure that would allow for the subsequent construction of feeder roads. This did not seem to mollify the Acting Governor, however. In subsequent talks USAID promised to consider additional work on the project that would build some basic feeder roads to the desired locations.

Comment

¶19. The central government officials were clearly taken aback by the criticism they received in what they expected to be a love fest over the building of the new road. It is indicative of the need for the GoSS to work much harder to plug into the needs of local communities and to better communicate GoSS plans for the South. This gap and mistrust will have obviously implications for the 2009 elections if the SPLM doesn't tend to its constituents. The design of the road is probably correct, but the GoSS Ministers should have been aware of local opposition to the plan and have been better prepared to deal with local concerns. Southern unity depends on local perceptions that the GoSS listens to them. President Kiir seems to recognize this, and in a speech March 10 at the 5th Annual Southern Sudan Governors Conference he said, "Frankly speaking, what we are seeing and experiencing is a huge GoSS structure far away from the people. This requires us to critically rethink the way we have been operating as a level of government within a decentralized system. This may further require us to rethink matters not only in terms of power and intergovernmental linkages but also in terms of allocation of resources to the other levels of government."

FERNANDEZ